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SUBJECT: NUNAVUT TERRITORY: AMBASSADOR'S OCT. 4-7 VISIT

1. Summary: During an October 4-7 visit to Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut Territory, the Ambassador met with a range of federal, provincial and municipal officials, as well as with representatives of the Inuit community. Climate change and restrictions on seal hunting topped the list of our interlocutors' concerns, but missile defense also came up, favorably, as did control of the Northwest Passage through the Arctic. On climate change, the Ambassador said the Kyoto Protocol is not a panacea and made the point that the U.S. is putting more money into responding to climate change than Europe and Japan combined. On sealing, the Ambassador showed understanding of the adverse impact of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) on traditional Inuit culture and encouraged the Inuit to work with the government of Canada to put this on the GOC's agenda. End summary.

Background

2. Created in 1999, Nunavut is Canada's youngest territory. The region's arctic climate, vastness and isolation, coupled with a bottoming out of the Inuit's traditional sealing and hunting economies, result in a Territory heavily dependent upon federal subsidies and plagued with social ills (e.g., the suicide rate is estimated at anywhere from one out of five to one out of eight of the adult population). Nunavut officials are making trade-based education a priority. Nunavut also is saddled with a complex set of overlapping bureaucracies: the Government of Nunavut represents all of the people of Nunavut while Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), established under the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA), defends Inuit interests and oversees the 1.14 billion dollars transferred by Ottawa under that Agreement. Ironically, although Inuit comprise 85 percent of Nunavut's population of 28,000, they are clearly in a minority in the leadership of both NTI and the GON.

Marine Mammal Protection Act

3. In every meeting, officials raised with the Ambassador the devastating effect of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) on Inuit society and on the economy. Deputy Premier Levinia Brown said that sealing is essential to the Inuit, who use all parts of the seal for food, clothing and heating oil. She distinguished Nunavut sealing from the slaughter of baby seals in Newfoundland, decried throughout the world. The Deputy Premier said the GON wants the MMPA amended, to recognize the unique situation of the Inuit people. GON Minister of Education Ed Picco (a former Hudson Bay trader himself) told the Ambassador that Nunavut hunters used to be self-sustaining but that since the 1972 passage of the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, sealing is no longer economically viable. The dependence of Inuit hunters on government handouts has soared from about 20 percent of the population thirty years ago to 80 percent today. According to the Minister, the difficulty for the Inuit in transitioning to a modern economy is reflected in a host of social problems in the region, from a high suicide rate, to alcoholism and domestic violence. Picco said the GON has been working to promote Nunavut's sealskin products but that it was time to put the MMPA back on the table. The Ambassador responded that it was important for decision makers in Congress to know all of the facts and that he would report to the State Department the GON's concern. He cautioned that it is difficult to change a law once it has been passed and that there are powerful lobbies backing the MMPA. The Ambassador noted that, for the GON to succeed, the GOC would need to make amending the MMPA a priority in its dealings in Washington. NTI representatives thanked the Ambassador for his suggestions and said that the Nunavut Sealing Strategy would be coming out shortly and NTI would make sure that it is presented to federal Canadian authorities.

Climate Change

4. Nunavut interlocutors also raised the impact of global warming on the arctic climate. Minister of the Environment Akesuk told the Ambassador that Pangnirtung used to have ten months of winter and that this has shrunk to roughly three months. There are major storms even in periods of warm weather. Different animals are also now appearing in the region and hunting has been adversely affected. Akesuk said that the GON has endorsed the climate change strategy under the Kyoto protocol but that climate change is a global issue that Nunavut cannot tackle alone. For this reason, the GON is focusing less on halting climate change and more on readying itself for the

future under changed climate conditions. (The GON, for example, is looking at how it may need to approach building construction once the permafrost disappears.) The Ambassador stressed the U.S.'s leadership role on climate change. The U.S. is spending more on addressing climate change than Europe and Japan combined, he said, and the administration wants to respond to global warming based upon sound science and the transformative power of technology.

Missile Defense

15. In addition to climate change and the MMPA, NTI officials also raised missile defense. NTI C.O.O. Richard Paton said NTI understands that the USG does not at this stage plan to use any region of Canada for missile defense but that this could change should missile defense move forward and Canada is asked to participate. If Nunavut were to be used for missile defense, Paton wanted the U.S. to be aware that the Nunavut Land Claims Act provides for preferential treatment of Inuit contractors. Paton did not express opposition to missile defense but rather stressed that NTI would like to see a missile defense program that "minimizes the environmental impact and maximizes the economic benefit to Nunavut." They would want Nunavut/Inuit representatives in all phases of discussion. NTI officials cited the Denmark and Greenland agreements on missile defense as positive models. (Comment: NTI's position on U.S. missile defense reflects the generally positive attitudes in Nunavut toward the U.S. military, which is remembered for having contributed extensively to Iqaluit's infrastructure, including construction of the Iqaluit airport in 1947. End comment.)

Northwest Passage

16. NTI officials also asked whether the U.S. might change its position on the Northwest Passage through Arctic waters. The Ambassador noted in his meeting with NTI officials (and later that day in a radio interview with a local CBC reporter) that if the Northwest Passage is considered to be international rather than Canadian waters, it becomes more difficult to check for terrorists. The Ambassador said that he has made this point to Washington but that it was not clear at this point whether the U.S. would change its position and support Canadian control of the Northwest Passage based upon terrorist considerations. NTI said that for the Inuit, the question is environmental, and they feel strongly about it.

FRIEDMAN